The Kelpie and the Black Shuck

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The Kelpie and the Black Shuck

by Anna_Jay

Summary

A story of a town in the middle of the forest and the black shuck that guards them.

The black shuck was both feared and loved by the townsfolk. He was a large, black dog, almost the size of a young cow with sharp white teeth and piercing white-blue eyes. The beast kept to himself, wandering the edges of the forest hunting rabbits or sleeping. He was always there even if the others couldn't see him. He followed travelers when they walked the paths at night, ensuring they were safe once they got to their destination, he made sure no one was hurting each other, and most importantly he guarded the children of the town.

The black shuck kept the children safe, guarding them from afar as they played in the forest. The children knew he was there, but the dog never bothered them, so they left him alone. They liked to play hide and seek among the trees, hiding in the bushes and climbing rocks to get to higher ground. Some days they would bring a ball and try to entice the black shuck into playing with them, but in the end they would toss the ball to each other and continue ignoring their watchful guardian.

However, there was another job the black shuck had, one the townsfolk hated and feared. Some times the black shuck would come into town and scratch at the door of the unfortunate person's house. He was never allowed in, no matter how much he begged and whined. Everyone knew when the black shuck came into town someone was going to die. They tried to scare him off, threatening him and throwing stones at him, but the person still died. Perhaps the shuck had a sixth sense of death and came to warn the others of the unfortunate's soon to come end. Others in the town believed he sucked the souls from them, causing them to die. No one knew for sure, but it had only happened a handful of times over the years.

There was a lake just at the edge of the forest that separated the town from the mountains. If the townsfolk wanted to get to the capital which was beyond the mountains, then they either had to cross the lake or go the long way around. Only fishermen dared to cross, and very few ever returned. It got to the point where the people were too afraid to go near the lake, the only source of water. The men would band together and go in groups of ten, hauling as much water as they could and keeping an eye out for the monsters that slept in the water. The black shuck would accompany them, hiding in the shadows, keeping an eye on them to make sure nothing happened. Many of the men were fathers of the children he watched.

This went on for weeks until the fear went down and smaller groups would go out. No one saw the monsters that dragged their victims away, so they didn't know what to look for. The black shuck didn't know either. He had an idea, but he couldn't tell the people. He was just a dog.

The children were all told never to go to the lake; that it was dangerous. They listened to their parents, sticking to the forest and playing hide and seek. However, there was a foolish girl with bright red hair who decided to go out on her own and investigate the lake. Other children went with her, trying to drag her back to the safety of the forest. The black shuck followed too.

“Mama says it's too dangerous, Freddie!” one of the girls said, but Freddie didn't listen. She continued to march in the direction of the lake, and when they got there nothing was there. The children stood huddled in a group as they looked around, but nothing happened.

Freddie stepped away from the group and edged closer to the empty dock, looking around one more time before turning to her friends. “See! Nothing! I told you they were lying.”

“But papa says the creature lives in the lake, Freddie.” a boy piped up.

“Have any of your parents told you what *it* looks like?” the red head asked, and all of the children shook their heads. “It doesn't exist. The only monster we know is that black mutt.”

Some of the children began to protest when they heard something. It was quiet once more before the sound came again. It sounded like... a horse.

The children looked back to the lake and suddenly saw the black horse standing on the shore. They hadn't heard or seen him come, but he was so beautiful. The children gasped as the horse came closer, his head lowered. His fur looked so glossy and smooth and before they knew it the children were walking toward the horse, hands stretched out to pet his muzzle.

The black shuck, however, had watched how the horse gracefully emerged from the water and jumped from his hiding spot, barking at the dark horse. The horse lowered horse ears, nose flaring as he watched the dog, hooves scuffing into the dirt.

“Go away, you stupid dog.” Freddie yelled. She picked up a rock and threw it at the black shuck, but it missed. The dog didn't pay her any attention, continuing to bark and bark.

The black shuck's barking alerted the adults and they came running to the lake. They took one look at the horse and raised the weapons they brought with them.

“It's a kelpie!” one of the men shouted as he tried to stab the water horse. The children ran screaming, but the kelpie didn't mind them. He turned his attention on the men and let out a growl. He reared up onto his hind legs and brought it down upon the man with a pitchfork. Hooves transformed into claws and before anyone could do anything, the kelpie dragged the screaming man into the water. The men ran to the edge of the lake, but there was nothing they could do. The water horse and the man were gone.

Everyone stayed away from the lake for weeks. They had enough drinking water to survive, but they couldn't bathe or wash clothes until the mayor decided it was safe enough to go near it again. During this time the black shuck made rounds near the lake, keeping an attentive eye out for any strange ripples in the water.

It was the fourth day when the water horse resurfaced a couple miles away from the town. He was stalking a traveler when the black shuck attacked. The horse huffed and snarled at him, but the dog was more clever and faster than his usual prey. He ran circles around the kelpie, nipping at his hooves and jumping nimbly away from sharp teeth and claws.

Finally, after seeing his original target was long gone, the kelpie gave up and returned to the lake. The black dog watched until the horse was fully submerged before going on his way. He didn't get far when a giant wave came up and soaked him to the bone. The black shuck gave a startled yelp and leaped to the safety of the bushes. He whined as water got into his pointy

ears and shook his fur dry. From the lake he could hear the water horse, seemingly laughing at the poor dog. The black shuck glared as the kelpie's head breached the water, the two falling into a staring match.

The water horse smiled and shot water at the wet dog, and the black shuck growled. Almost without thinking, the black shuck thrust his front paws into the water and splashed back. Both supernatural beings were shocked before a water war began. The black shuck yipped and barked as he ran along the shoreline, and the kelpie kept up.

The black shuck couldn't remember a time when he had so much fun. Since he became the unofficial guardian of the town he had no one to play with. The other black dogs looked down upon him. He was too strange with his white-blue eyes instead of red and his too benevolent nature. None of the humans dared to come near him and although the children offered to play he was too scared of hurting one.

The kelpie was different. Sure, he threatened his town and the people in it, but it was his nature. The black shuck couldn't blame him for what he was, and it seemed the kelpie was the same say. They were enemies when the kelpie attacked those under his protection, but now, now they could be themselves. Just as long as the black shuck stayed out of the water.

They continued paying their version of tag when the horse's head suddenly disappeared. The black dog stood stock still, searching for him when he heard a noise behind him.

Some villagers came from behind the bushes and looked around, alerted to the dog's noises. When they saw nothing but the sopping wet dog, they sneered down at him.

“What a stupid thing.” one of the men said. “barking at nothing.”

“What if there was something?” asked the other.

“Doubtful. I wish the mayor would just let us kill it. Its nothing but trouble.” the first man said. He lifted a hand and struck at the shuck, and the dog didn't try and dodge it. It didn't hurt, but he did give a soft whine. “I don't understand how the mayor's wife can have any attachment to this dumb mutt.”

And with that they left. The shuck watched sadly as they left, head lowered at the acknowledgment of his unwantedness. The water moved behind him and a small nip to the tail later caused the dog to forget his sorrows and focus on glaring at the pleased water horse.

The water war started anew.

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The mayor of the town had a beautiful wife whom everyone called Bella. Bella was kind to everyone, no matter what they did or had done in the past. She was especially kind to the black shuck. If she was out on a walk and happened to see him she would wave or even coax him to come close so she could pet him. The beast liked her and always kept an extra eye out so nothing bad happened to her. However, even he couldn't stop death.

He could smell it on her months ago and tried to warn her, nudging her and giving small whines, but she didn't understand. Soon she was unable to even leave her home, too sick to leave bed. The townsfolk came and bid her to get well, bringing flowers and herbs from other towns. But the black shuck knew better. He knew she was going to die. At night he would sit at the mayor's home and quietly whine to be let in. He could help ease her passing. He could take her pain away if only they let him. His whines were met by the mayor's angry voice and stones and sticks were thrown until he had no choice but to return to the safety of the forest. The mayor, in denial over his wife's coming end, thought if the black dog was kept away then she would get better. Alas, after another month of fighting it, Bella passed away in her sleep.

The town mourned for the loss of the mayor's wife, but none more than the black shuck. He howled clear into the night.

A doctor had come to town during Bella's sickness. He was a stupidly superstitious man and a bit of a fool, but everyone listened to him. When Bella died the mayor turned on him, blaming him for her death. However, the doctor soon put the blame on the one thing the town had an uneasy alliance with: the black shuck.

“It is the black dog's fault for the death of Bella and every one else who might have met their end before their time!” the doctor exclaimed, and one by one the others chimed in agreement. “We must drive it away or kill it before it can claim more souls.”

After that night it was a war against the people and the black shuck. The children no longer played in the forest and anytime someone spotted the large black dog they threw stones at him or if they had weapons struck him. The dog didn't leave, though. If he left then the kelpie would attack and kill them. Didn't they understand that he was trying to protect them?

For days this went on until finally someone summoned a blacksmith to make silver bullets. If silver worked against most supernatural beings, then it should work on the beast. A group of twenty men went out in the dead of night in search for the black shuck, but they didn't have to look far. The dog watched as they grew closer, his teeth bared, but he did not move to attack. He knew he should run, knew he should try and prove he was only trying to help. But he could not speak.

Soon the men fell upon him with clubs and knives. The dog defended himself, biting and scratching at those who hurt him until finally he slipped out of their grasp. He ran away from the town. The mayor was one of the men in the group and aimed his gun with silver bullets and fired three times. A pained yelp ran throughout the forest, and the men cheered in victory.

The ran began to fall as they searched for the black dog and soon found a bloody trail. The dog laid sprawled on a dusty road that was near the lake, breathing heavily as he tried to crawl to his feet. He let out pained whimpers as his legs gave out under him and thick rivers of blood poured from his hind leg and side.

The men hooed and hollered at the sight and the black dog could do nothing as they drew closer. The mayor raised his gun and aimed at his head, and the black shuck closed his eyes in defeat.

A sinister growl filled the air and from the bushes reared the kelpie. The water horse kicked the gun from the mayor's hands and came crashing down upon him, killing him instantly. It then turned on the other men, its front hooves transforming into claws as it clawed at them, forcing them to touch its skin and become trapped until they were killed. Only a few managed to escape, but the kelpie didn't chase after them. It watched and growled after them, but turned its attention to the injured black shuck. The dog had managed to get to his feet, wobbling and as it walked down the road. The kelpie watched as he made it a few steps before collapsing onto the ground. The dog whined, but he was too tired to try and stand any more. The kelpie watched to make sure the dog wasn't going to try and move again before turning to his new meals.

The black shuck listened as the water horse dug into the flesh, wincing as the flesh ripped and bone snapped. The music of death continued until it was just the sound of the rain falling upon the ground and the shuck's haggard breathing. Then the kelpie came closer, and the black shuck closed his eyes against his inevitable end. The kelpie stopped beside him and something thudded against the wet grass. The black dog dared to open his eyes.

A heart sat before him, pristine and whole. It had been carefully cut out and was now being offered to him. The dog looked down at the heart before his near white blue eyes sought out the maroon tinged black of the water horse. The other creature didn't do anything. He just simply watched.

The dog gave in and inched forward before weakly taking a small bite out of the offered heart. The water horse gave an encouraging whinny and nudged the heart closer. The black shuck ate the entire organ, but soon was presented another, and after that another, before he could not eat any more.

The kelpie nodded his head and turned his attention on the silver bullets still inside the weak dog. With his front hooves still transformed into claws, the water horse set out to dig out the pesky bullets. The black shuck yowled and tried to move away, but the kelpie kept him still long enough to remove the silver.

As soon as they were gone the black shuck felt better. He could feel his wounds and injures already starting to heal, but it would take time. He was exhausted and heartbroken. He had been driven away; nobody wanted him.

The kelpie nudged his muzzle against the large dog's head, gently taking an ear into his maw of sharp teeth and sucking on it. The black shuck shook his head to free it, but the water horse snatched it up once more until the dog gave in. It was relaxing, in a strange sort of way.

Once the black shuck was completely relaxed to the point of sleep, the kelpie laid down next to him and leaned against him. The dog felt the water horse's adhesive skin begin to attach to his fur, but there was little he could do about it. When he was secured to the kelpie's side, the water horse stood up and made his way to the lake. The shuck should have felt fear or terror at the idea he was going to be taken under water to the kelpie's lair, but he could not bring himself to care. He just took a big breath as they went underwater.

A group of villagers came and found the carnage left behind, but could not find a trace of either the black shuck or the kelpie. Days and weeks went by without a sighting, but the town

didn't celebrate. They buried what they could find of the mayor and the other hunting party members, and they tried to pick their lives back up. Children played in the forests again, but they began to disappear, and soon fear fell upon the town once more. The safety of their homes didn't save them as more and more villagers began to disappear, and soon it was no longer safe to travel whether it be day or night. One by one the entire town was nothing but a ghost town.

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